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Being a university student, not only in Jordan of course, means having quite some time to mingle with people of the same and of the opposite sex, and the process of becoming a recognised adult involves not only accessing a profession but also, if not more importantly, to establish emotional bonds both with friends and with potential partners. This helps understand why the campus of the University of Jordan is animated well beyond class hours, and even on Saturdays when no official lesson is held, as I will show in details in what follows, and why the university years are so important for most students in the construction of their loving subjectivities.

The context of Jordan cannot be considered as encouraging forms of pre-marital romantic experiences, especially when women are concerned, and even in its capital city Amman most people tend to have a great capability of quickly placing interlocutors in their own cognitive frames – this result in having relations with members of similar social groups, also within the university campus, and strengthens the social control over intimate relationships. The ethnographic cases I present here are thus quite interesting in order to improve our understanding of how young people represent and practice their romantic affairs in a rather conservative context, for in their lives romantic love ideals clash with common realities of extended families' involvement in marital choices, where issues of class, gender, status and confession play a heavy role.

In this paper I will thus present the context of the university of Jordan in this regard, focusing especially on gender roles as portrayed by different actors within the university and on female students' representations of the risks associated with having an open approach to young men (something almost inconceivable in most neighbourhoods of the city, let alone in the countryside, but somehow possible on campus), before examining some life stories of young women and men. The life-stories will focus in particular

on how these young Jordanians present the issue of romantic love, as a middle class ideal of self-realisation, and especially as opposed to common ideas regarding acceptable relationships in nowadays Jordan.

Most of the students that I will introduce here were met during my PhD research in Amman, between 2003 and 2005, and since I kept the contacts with most of them during these years, up to my latest field in Amman in January-February 2012, I have been able to trace the trajectories of their love experiences for the last ten years or so, well beyond their university experience of mainly imagined affairs into the life of young adults with complex sentimental and working lives. Aim of the paper is to show that it is not easy to draw simple equations in love affairs – like the higher the social class, the more freedom in choosing life partners, or like the more educated a person is, the less likely s/he is to choose a deeply religious husband or wife – but that a romantic love perspective is quite fruitful in examining how young people in contemporary Jordan come to shape their own subjectivities and lives.

The city: making sense of spatial differentiation within society

Some recent anthropological works (Hannoyer and Shami 1996, Ababsa and Daher 2011) have attempted at discussing the social construction of the city of Amman. This area of interest is included within a growing interest for the role of cities, especially capitals (Elsheshtawi 2008, Singermann and Amar 2006, among others), in the identity politics of contemporary Arab world. As I understand these attempts, they are all trying to make sense of the growing cultural and social, other than economic or political, differentiations within Arab societies, and of the fact that these differentiations have been gaining relevance in the last decades in the context of globalization. It is thus in this sense that I read the studies done in/on Amman as particularly helpful in understanding the contexts in which young people´s subjectivities come to be formed.

I found particularly interesting and useful Shami´s work, which explores the concepts of inclusion and exclusion, private and public spheres, belonging and the production of the "Other". She connects these concepts and notions within Jordanian society with its different stratifications of gender, age and social position. "Do men and women participate similarly? Do individuals from different ages within households benefit equally?" (Hannoyer and Shami 1996: 45), and this fundamental question is at the core of my analysis as well. Inclusion, in her analysis, is then related to freedom, rights, and equal

opportunities among gender, age, and social position. According to Shami, to understand the city as a social space, we need to understand who makes the space, and how it is used. Shami connects the different characteristics of the space as being private, public, sacred, closed, and accessible with how the space is reproduced and framed, how it is protected or transgressed through violence and how this affects and formulates or eliminates the space of the "Other". That can be specified according to class, consumption, the way of dressing, and the use of public and private spheres. I am openly following her insights, trying to apply them to the university campus and its social reality, in the belief that the liminality produced in the educational spaces is best understood in a close relation with the social and political context.

Talking about social class – keeping in mind that this notion is particularly hard to apply consistently to the Jordanian society – I follow Musa Shteiwi, who identifies four classes in Amman: upper class, middle class, working class, and the dispossessed class, though the structures and boundaries of these classes are continuously subject to change (Shteiwi 1996). In 1991 the "middle class" included professionals of all kinds, semiprofessionals, clerks and small business owners constituting. He approximates the impact of this class on the total population to be ranging between 25-32%. This class is relatively large and becoming more differentiated, as the same process could be seen elsewhere in the world – combination of economic neo-liberal policies and restructuring of populations are widening these internal differentiations, and as a result there is an increased social pressure on this class to keep its position in light of economic hardships. I do not have the time to enter into details here but I claim that this process is highly significant for the university life as well. Of course, the concept of social class is to be taken with particular caution*.*

Back to Amman and its social stratification, hoping not to over-simply complex realities in my attempt at making the context clearer, it can be argued that West Amman is an area where the middle class has constantly been represented, and that has been home to upper classes as well. My own observations and those of my key informants provide some added insights as to how class and society play out in Amman today due to the rapid and continuous changes happening in the Jordanian society. Many of these transformations occurring in Amman are usually characterized by "Westernization" (see also Cantini 2013). Amman´s society is influenced by western values, not only economically but also in social spheres. "Amman today is not so much a different city from what it was a decade ago, as it is two cities: cosmopolitan West Amman, where development is unfolding at breakneck speed and foreign investment has skyrocketed, and

East Amman, the bustling, dusty home to a majority of the city's poor and working-class residents" (Schwedler 2010: 547). This spatial distinction is usually taken to a less descriptive and more ethic realm, for example in quotes like w*hile the people of East Amman represent less privileged economic classes and are known to be more conservative, West Ammanis are more of a middle and upper class background and known to be more Westernized , less religious and more liberal.*

The social interaction in West Amman usually takes place in social clubs in which there are considerable opportunities for marriage possibilities and checking for prospective partners. This process has been described by Anouk de Konig in her study on cosmopolitan dreams and youth (de Konig 2006). Her study is set in Cairo, Egypt, but having a personal knowledge of the two settings I argue that some reflections are valid also for West Amman, especially for what concerns youth's socialization patterns. One of the main changes in this respect is the fact that coffee houses that were known usually as males places are also common for women. This takes place due to the common perception in Amman that having mixed groups of males and females reflect more openness, while the opposite case of having same sex friends only reflect conservatism – and as we will see this perception is rather common within the university campus as well.

The University

Despite the social separation of the university campus from the city, it is possible to draw a similar distinction between the different faculties within the same university, with the interesting fact that the spatial differentiation between social groups is considerably lower than in the city. It is precisely this proximity, and the fact that it is perceived as such by many students who operate precise distinctions among the different social backgrounds of those attending certain faculties, that renders the object of this study suitable for showing contrasting ways of subjectivity building within the same country, as well as within the same social category, such as "student" or "youth" (Cantini 2012).

The campus, located on the northern edge of the city, is surrounded by walls, and its entrances are guarded by security staff. It is a pleasant, open space, with many green areas and small pathways, one of the very few spaces in town where youth can gather (almost) freely. The main gate leads to the clock tower, and to its left are the various

faculties of humanities while the scientific faculties are grouped to its right. The library and the canteen are situated in the middle of the campus.

The social gatherings of students that are more common within the more privileged faculties are not to be found among the less prestigious ones, not only as a result of the different social backgrounds of the students but also because in the latter they are more likely to be seen as inappropriate. Here a student can be questioned or even sanctioned if he or she is doing something "wrong". I am not arguing that social control is ubiquitous, nor that it somehow determines the entirety of social relations; it is nonetheless crucial to understand the importance that the context has in order to establish and sustain socializing patterns, especially for what concerns romantic affairs.

The differences between "shari' oroba" (Europe Street, the courtyard immediately next to it and the nearby paths in front of the Faculty of Literature) or the "saha al-'ilm" (Science Square, located in the middle of the science faculties, on the opposite side of the campus to the humanities faculties) and the courtyards of the less prestigious faculties are immediately recognizable, and some students of these latter faculties, mainly males, go to the former because of the possibility of meeting girls. To be true, female students are to be found in each faculty, but given the social stratification among faculties (more on this in what follows) male students tend to believe that girls in the best faculties are more open, or at least desirable. These groups of male students are not really welcomed by students of the best faculties and thus they end up in liminal spaces that are disregarded by the more privileged students, who call these spaces "shari' al-gypsy" or "shari' al-nas" (gypsy's and people's street, respectively), to indicate that these streets and alleys are not specific to any faculty or group of faculties, spaces where anyone could go. These spaces are usually overcrowded even on Saturdays and during class time.

The very fact of being in a group of friends, including both boys and girls, chatting, laughing and flirting, smoking and drinking, is quite peculiar to the best faculties (as it is peculiar to West Amman). Girls in Jordan normally do not smoke in public, nor do they engage in prolonged conversations with boys, and laughing is not considered acceptable for a proper Muslim girl, at least not in public and with boys around. Since gossip is highly damaging for the reputation of women, and especially of those who are less able to defend themselves or who cannot afford to have a bad reputation, most girls have to pay attention to their public behaviours. The campus should not be understood as a space distanced from the social stratifications of the city; on the contrary, social divi-

sions are to be found also within the campus, where the need to operate distinctions is made all the more urgent by the spatial proximity among different social groups. Not surprisingly, the need for keeping the social boundaries is placed on girls, and on their behaviours. Moreover, the attention on public behaviours is made even more stringent by the requests of public morals and decency, usually framed within the local, rather restrictive, understanding of the Islamic tenets.

As I have been arguing elsewhere, these socialization patterns reflect a rift in Jordanian society, between the more affluent who are accustomed to travelling abroad and having contact with foreigners, and those who are of more humble origins, with less opportunities of getting to know a world different than their own. This rift has widened in recent years, partly as a result of the liberalization policies implemented by the regime which are changing the structure of Jordanian society. As Jordan is a small country, it is usual for a student to be identified with one of the main social groups – being from Amman or not, Jordanian or not, from a well-known family or not, and the like – even though this is seldom admitted outright and only prolonged mutual acquaintance allows this kind of information to emerge, especially if this identification has negative consequences. The division into these categories is quite important for the daily lives of the students, and the religious division, important as it is, is simply a part of this.

Romantic versus acceptable love on campus

I was often told that the university years are not so relevant for future careers – the role of *wasta* (an intermediary, family member or friend, who "helps"; literally the word means "medium") and the importance of family networks in finding good jobs is normally taken for granted – nor to open one's mind – the usual refrain being that courses and curricula are designed to avoid all interesting topics, and that most professors will be incapable of dealing with them anyway. Other than in getting the famous *shahada,* the "piece of paper" that still accompanies the value given to education in Jordan, the real use and value of attending the university is to stay away from home for long hours – hence the crowded campus during Saturdays as well (on Fridays access is restricted to those who live in the dormitories located within the campus itself), and the packed alleys behind most faculties, especially after winter that in Amman can be cold – and more importantly to get to know representatives of the opposite sex.

The context of Jordan cannot be considered as encouraging forms of pre-marital romantic experiences, especially when women are concerned, and even in its capital city Amman most people tend to have a great capability of quickly placing interlocutors in their own cognitive frames – this result in having relations with members of similar social groups, also within the university campus, and this strengthens the social control over intimate relationships.

One day I was speaking with Yazid, a lower-middle-class student in one of the best faculties, and he was actually complaining about the fact that he had not had a proper affair in quite some time, when Samira passed by and stopped to greet me. As she was indeed quite attractive, and a student in the same faculty, I was surprised to notice that Yazid not only did not make any attempt at making himself noticed, but that on the contrary he almost retreated from the scene. As soon as she left I quickly asked him why he had not tried an approach, given that as far as I knew Samira was not engaged and that he was actually complaining about not having an affair, and as usual I was quite shocked with his answer "she's not for one like me". With this I understood that he pointed out to the obvious class distinction among the two of them, something that I also noticed but that in my view were not necessarily preventing him from approaching her – romantic love, or in this case courtship, coming first than many other things.

The more I understood the local socialization patterns the more I understood how much Yazid was right; when class differences are too evident, and they were not so only for me, the newly come alien, there is no room for interaction, apart from verbally harassing girls – but this is something that a nice boy would not to, surely not in front of his own faculty where the risk of being caught is just too high, and especially not in front of a foreigner. This points to the increased difficulties of boys in respecting the obligations that the patriarchal system places on them as bread-winners and first providers for their families, and this phenomenon is already addressed in studies on the increased age of marriage in most Arab countries (Singerman 2008). Yazid, for instance, is now almost 35 and still unmarried, living in his family's East Amman building that hosts his parents, a divorced sister with her children, and that is the base where his brothers, who all live abroad, come when they are back in Amman. Needless to say, in this condition he would have had little to offer to Samira, and this simply prevented him from even making his attempt.

On the other side of the moon, female students usually associated high risks if allowing an open approach to young men. We shall bear in mind that this is something incon-

ceivable in the city, apart from restricted occasions of socialisation such as those explored by Schwedler – women are not supposed to be the ones who take the initiative, as a general rule, and they better safeguard their attire and reputation if they do not want to get into troubles that could be rather heavy (for an anthropological discussion on how female university students try to combine the need of being attractive and the obligation of being consistent with their self-presentations, see Kaya 2010).

Here though is where a certain paradoxical nature of university life comes in; the vast campus allows for a certain degree of privacy, and for the flourishing of affairs (imagined or real), that are decidedly on top of the list of conversation topics among both boys and girls – but rarely in mixed groups. Girls and boys do enjoy some freedoms more than in their neighbourhoods, especially for those who come from East Amman or from provinces. This reflects in some social change, the most noted aspect of which – women' empowerment, their access to higher education as being an achievement that relates to other social domains as well, such as later marriage and more work possibilities – has been already discussed (Droeber 2005, Jansen 2006, Adely 2012), while the presence of even prevalence of romantic love discourse has been thus far mostly ignored, but is, as I argue, greatly relevant for young students' lives, and especially for girls. At the same time, as I already elaborated upon, the campus reflects broader societal issues, and as such it can not be considered as a place where flirting goes on openly, or where girls could walk free, harassment being quite a challenge, at many levels, including the professorial one – especially in less privileged faculties it is not uncommon to have episodes of discrimination against female students. I personally witnessed a lesson in Educational Sciences where the professor, lecturing some 200 students mostly female, started shouting against the uselessness of teaching anything to girls, given that their only goal is to go back to their villages, get married and have an unreasonable number of kids. Amazingly, there was not a single sign of rebellion against him, and this not simply because of his position (although limited, there are some forms of contesting professors in classes) but rather because these forms of open discrimination are not uncommon, and are almost taken for granted. Other forms of harassment are more similar to what could happen on the streets, with boys following a lonely girl and teasing her, and there are currently attempts at curbing this phenomenon.

Social boundaries are strictly enforced within student life as well – as we saw in Samira's case, class differences are usually immediately detected and are held as highly relevant in everyday choices, and as I argue these are increasingly mingled with

differences among faculties. Other differences include religion, for instance; a Christian male student, who was always in company of Muslim friends, once went to a month trip to a European country organised by his faculty for some best students, and he happened to be the only boy in the group. Upon returning, he told me that he was going to get officially engaged with one of the female students who took part in the trip. As I was asking for more details, he answered half joking (and half not) that she was his only possible choice, for she is Christian as well – then he reassured me that he was actually in love with her, and they are now married. It is of course hard to dismiss the role that the social context had in his "choice".

This should not be taken as a monolithic and unchanging reality; not only the situation is changing rapidly, in opposite directions, but more importantly there are always exceptions. For instance, the university (and the ethnographer as well) is somehow enabling some odd situations to happen, such as girl complaining about a presumed lack of sentimental education of most boys, and elaborating on what she means by romantic love in front of the ethnographer and of a male student who tries to fight back. From a boys perspective, the ideal figure of romantic love is put in clear contrast with the necessities of a marriage; the image of the latin lover, busy in many romantic and sexual affairs, does not include the happy end of romantic comedies, that the loved one will then be married – to be true, this is more likely to be pointed out by girls, who say that most boys do not know what do they want, caught between an ideal of a perfect virgin and inaccessible girl as a future wife and the desire of having an affair.

The point I would like to make again is that the university as a space should be seen as enabling contacts, affairs, and different sorts of negotiation; moreover, it is a space where different kinds of people do get together at the end, or are at least aware of the existence of other groups that the social spatiality of Amman struggles to keep apart.

It is especially to be noted that the relatively new phenomenon of the education of girls is breaking some gender rules and roles, for example in the well known effect of postponing the age of marriage, but we have to be careful in over-stating the social effects of education. Class boundaries and imagined gender roles are not easily bridged, nor the existence of the other is in itself enough to recognize it. Yet I believe that the public education system, especially at the university level, is enabling some more consciousness at the level of a more complex understanding of citizenship. As far as boys are concerned, it is clear that there is a huge difficulty in leaving the image of the (young) patriarch, able to win the bread for his family without the help of his wife.

Conclusion

Suad Joseph (1999, 2000) wrote about the different selves in Arab families and their relationship to gender and identity. Through her explanation to the relationality and connectivity between family members, she outlined different kinds of selves, which are individualistic, familial, and spiritual. In Arab cultures, the familial selves have first priority in people's lives and identities, while the individualistic self is a last priority. The strong connectivity between family members is thought to be bounded by the structure of domination and patriarchy, by seeing the self in certain hierarchical level through the other. In other words, family connectivity in the Arab world stands as a support to patriarchal power.

The explanations given by Joseph and others about the different dimensions of family relations, connectivity, patriarchy and domination in Arab families clarify how norms, values, ethos, and traditions are embedded and built around these notions and serve as constraints in the lives of Arab women. Values of family and marriage are major ones as they constitute fundamental ground in preserving patriarchy and gender roles. It is in this context that it is crucial to look at how romantic love is lived by young people in a country like Jordan, usually considered as being rather conservative in public morality. Romantic love is normally considered as a prerogative of countries that give importance to the individual, but I hope to have shown here that it is actually widespread in other contexts as well. Of course, the context is to be taken into account – romantic love is a universal ideal and yet its manifestations are specific to different cultures – and in this essay I have sketched some points to start reflecting on the condition of university students in Amman, and especially on the university years as those in which the relevance of romantic love is at its highest, parallel to the social and cultural expectations on them.

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